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J.F.Taintor

THE FACE OF JESUS

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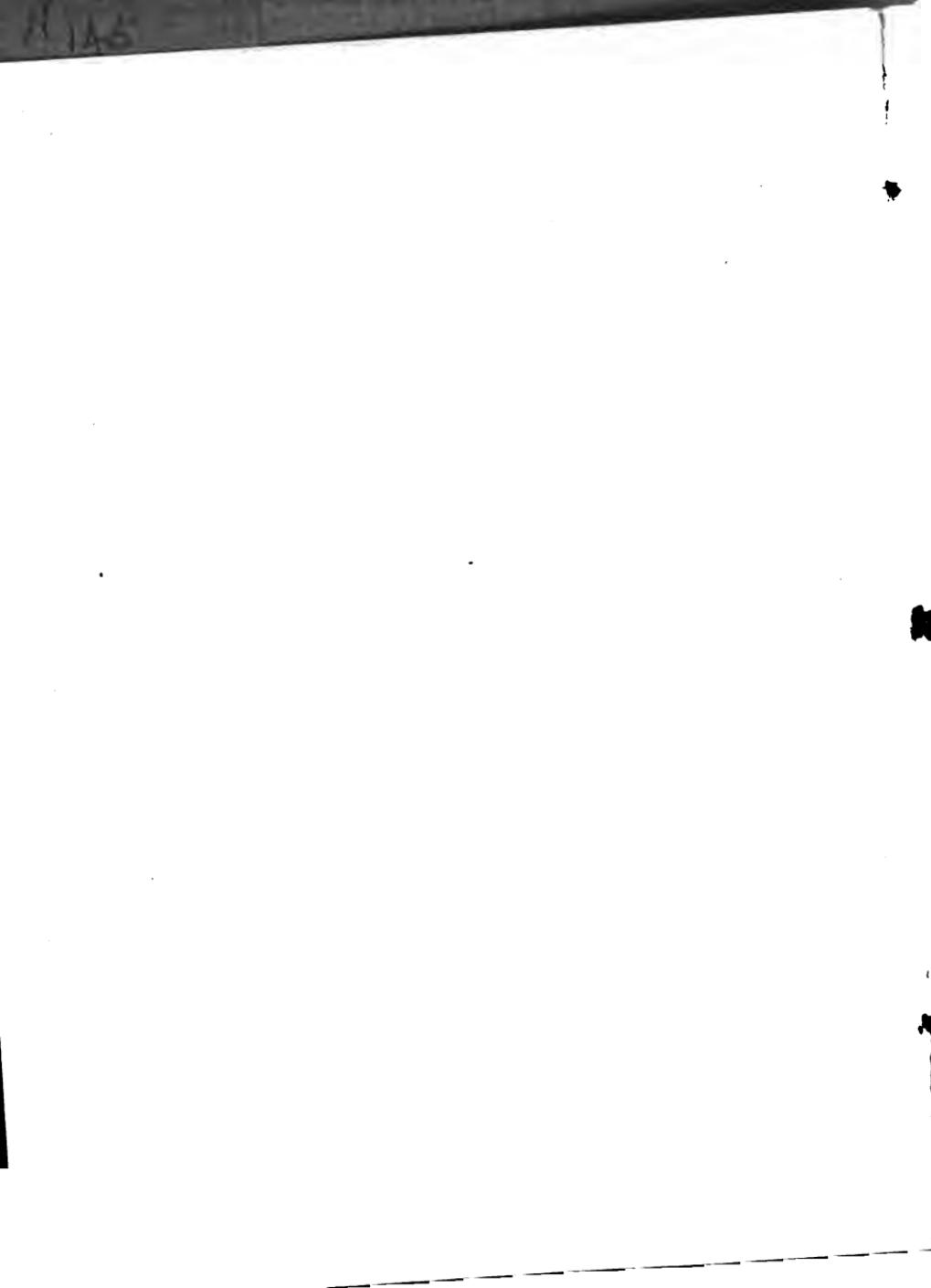
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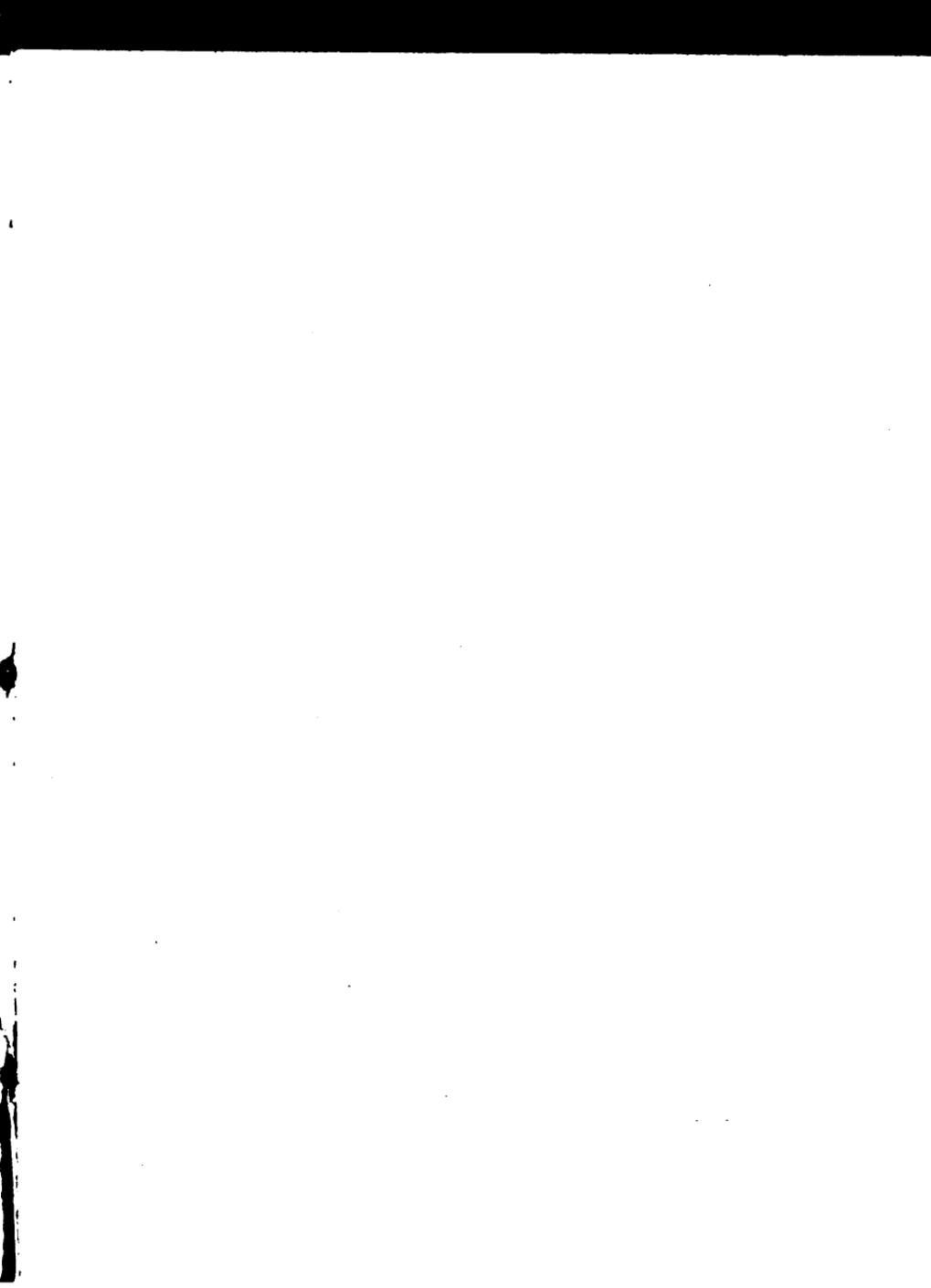


BY PAUL COLE











MURILLO.

THE FACE OF JESUS.

By J. F. Taintor.

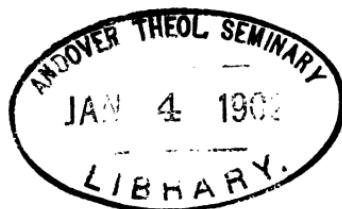
Anderson 1878.

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*Among the many pictures of Jesus, is there to
be found any real likeness to the man of Galilee?*

*To this question the Christian World has
given almost universally, a negative answer. The
following pages have been written in the faith
that such a likeness exists, and for the purpose of
presenting in brief outline some of the material,
by the study of which such a faith has been devel-
oped and upon which it continues to rest.*

**"THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE
FACE OF JESUS CHRIST."**

The Face of Jesus.

Of all the vanished faces, once loved by men, two only have been imaged on the Christian heart of the world—the face of Mary and the face of her divine Son.

The face of Mary is not always the same face, but it is always hers, revealing, in its many changes, every phase of virgin purity and every outgoing of mother-love. It has become humanity's ideal. The face of Jesus, whose emotions in manifold human experiences from the cradle to the cross, genius endeavors to portray, has been wrought into Christian memories as closely as color into the rose or fragrance into the lily.

The Madonna and the Christ are subjects of many books and of many canvasses. In the world's great galleries we find them, painted by the brush of genius, held as priceless treasures. In private collections, on walls and windows of church and cathedral, from glorious paintings within the altar, and from cruder colors that picture the stages of

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the cross, these faces of Mary and Jesus look on countless multitudes, upon whose hearts they have printed themselves, even as the faces of her children are graven on the mother's heart. In the homes of the rich they are often the richest treasures, and in humbler homes simple prints of the same faces are looked upon with reverent eyes.

The Madonna is a more frequent subject than the Christ. The genius of the sixteenth century lavished its life more abundantly, even more reverently, upon Mary than upon Jesus. Both, however, have been the artists' ideal; and these two faces are those the world knows best and most truly loves. However strained the imagination of the artist, however unworthy the workmanship, however unreal the faces, they are always recognized as meant for Mary and meant for Jesus. Familiar as they are, one fact is revealed by a comparison of a number of them taken at random from the works of reputable artists, that sometimes escapes the attention. They differ in this, that for the one face there are many types, for the other face there is one prevailing type. There is in the Madonna no constant element; in the pictures of the Christ every artist seems to have been haunted by the same vision.

The various Madonnas of a single artist, as Del Sarto, may bear to each other a close resemblance,



LEONARDO DA VINCI

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but they are unrelated to the Madonnas of other artists. There may be in Raphael's Gran Duca a touch of simplicity, given by the downcast eyes that is like the Madonna of the Goldfinch; but Raphael's forty or more Marys are not replicas, nor are they akin to the Marys painted by other artists. Every painter, though doubtless influenced by some master or masters, has chosen his own type and painted his own picture. We recognize Mary by the baby in her arms, or by some external sign, not because she resembles the Mary of our imagination, or the Mary we have elsewhere seen.

But of Jesus, even the casual observer must notice, we have only one face. There is a constant element, a single type. Having seen the Christ once, we know him wherever found or by whomsoever painted. The fact is so patent, so striking, that when once attention is called to it, it becomes necessary to revise the opening statement, and to say, "One face, not two, has been imaged on the Christian heart." The Madonnas are so diverse, so varied that they easily fall into the same category with other pictures, and might be portraits of so many beautiful mothers. But not so with Jesus. Whether painted by the sixteenth century or twentieth century artist; whether painted by an Englishman or a German, a pre-Raphaelite or a Nazarene, the face

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of Jesus is always like the face that other artists have painted.

If into the hand of a child of Christian home and of Christian training there is put an unmarked picture of Jesus, there will be a sure recognition. Few children will hesitate about a real Christ. The story told of the German sculptor Danneker, beautifully illustrates this fact. He worked a long time on his Christ. Then he set a child before the product of his labor and said, "Who is it?" The child did not know but ventured as an answer, "Some great man." Danneker knew he had failed of the best result, and he therefore wrought more carefully and more patiently. Then he tried again, and leading in the same child he said as he uncovered his work, "Who is it?" The child with reverent voice and with rising tears made answer: "Suffer the little children to come unto me." The real Christ was recognized.

How did the child know? What was there about it to reveal the Christ? One might be conscious of the divine presence if it were a living personality, but how know the Christ in a carved statue? What is it about any picture of Jesus that enables one to single him out from many others with unerring certainty?

Among ten thousand elm trees, no two are

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alike. Yet any one who knows elm trees, will say unhesitatingly of each one, "This is an elm." Among a million human faces no two are alike. Yet there is that in each one, however marred or imbruted, to mark it as human. Among the many paintings of Jesus no two are alike. Yet it is always the face that we know. As among the elm trees there is the type with the individual variations; as among men there is the human type with endless variety; so among the faces of Jesus, there is the typical face of which each is a variation, stamped with the individuality and possibly with the nationality of the artist. All the painters have had a glimpse of an ideal face, and though no two of them reproduce it alike, still that ideal face is present, dim, shadowy, fleeting but persistent.

There is, for example, a similarity hard to be accounted for in the type used by Hoffman in his "Christ in Gethsemane"; by Munkacsy in his "Christ Before Pilate"; by Ary Scheffer in his "Temptation"; and by Raphael in his "Transfiguration." It is remarkable that artists so widely apart should chose a common type for the face of Jesus.

The heart of one who looks upon one of Guido Reni's thorn-crowned heads is wrenched with pain to note the agonized face, upturned to heaven, beseeching relief; yet, in Correggio's picture of a beat-



GUIDO RENI.

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ified face, thorn-crowned, but unconscious of the thorns that press upon the brow, one may easily trace the resemblance to Guido's "Ecce Homo." It is also true that in a picture like the more modern one of H. C. Burton, "The World's Gratitude," in which the face, mild, benignant, but sorrowfully reproachful, looks from beneath its painful crown throughbarred windows, we find a companion piece, so far as type is concerned, to the paintings of Guido and of Correggio.

To make one more comparison. He who stands before the marred marvel of Da Vinci's painting, will not fail to say within himself, "This is the Master's Face." It compels the soul, and one feels as if in the very presence of Christ himself. On the other hand Rembrant's face of Jesus in "The Supper at Emmaus," bears the traces of a deeper experience than the Jesus of Da Vinci, even the experience of the cross, the tomb and the resurrection. Upon the table before him, there shines a glorious light, which can not come from any brightness without, for it was "towards evening" and the day was "far spent." Yet the light, so mysterious as to its source, so wondrous as to its effect, reveals, in the gathering twilight, the face of Jesus, worn, sad, sorrowful; and the two disciples, one already with an awakened awe, and the other with a bewildered sense of dawning

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recognition, look into the face, and as they look they see Jesus. As we look upon those that sit at meat at these two tables, we instinctively know that he who graces the head of one table is the same as he who, as guest, becomes host at the other.

It is this fact of a common likeness that gives to the paintings of Jesus an altogether unique character. It is as if a thousand artists scattered through twenty centuries, should chance upon an ideal type which with countless variations all should paint, yet so paint that the beholder who should look back upon the whole series, would see in each one a typical resemblance to every other; would feel that the same aura encompassed all or emanated from all.

So striking a fact ought to be accounted for if it is possible.

In the way of explanation this may be said. In the effort of genius to conceive a face that most truly reflects the beauty, and the majesty of Jesus, artists have been led instinctively, unconsciously, to the one type that best satisfies the artistic imagination. Having once caught the vision in color, having once imprinted on canvass the face that seems to mean most to the universal heart, the vision has been repeated and repeated till it has been wrought into the living consciousness of the church, and into

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the very fibre of the artists' thought, as the one fundamental conception, that is most satisfying, and perhaps most true to life. Something like this must be said, or believed, if there be no original from which the imagination of every artist has taken its departure.

But if this is said, then somewhere in the list of great names there must be found the artist who first imprisoned on the canvass the fleeting face that came to his inspired vision. If any man could do it he ought to be found among Italy's glorious constellation of the sixteenth century. When search is made among them, however, it will be seen that, while they all paint the same Christ, no one of them and no one of the schools originated the type. The type still antedates their day. Before men knew how to paint expression, before the day of Giotto, when men painted only in outline, there is present in all the pictures, the same conception of Christ.

The question that now, in view of these things; compels attention, is this, "How far back towards the day when the Son of Man walked beneath the Syrian sky, and loved his fellow men and was loved and hated by them, can this constant, this persistent element in the face of Jesus be traced?" It appears, as has been noted, in the earliest days of the Renaissance; what is behind those days? The world



HOFMANN.

THE FACE OF JESUS.

that looked through the eyes of Giotto into the past, faced almost a millenium of darkness. The mechanism of art survived in Byzantium; the dead forms from which art would again arise were there. Art was sleeping. For nearly a thousand years it had no apparent life. If with rapid wing one cleaves this darkness, and flies back through the empty, resounding centuries toward the earlier light, towards the day when art had lived before, what face, if any, will look out from the farther shore as the risen Jesus looked out in the dawning day upon those, his friends, who had just turned away from the night of death? For their pictures of Jesus, what face did the early Christians paint?

It appears first in the Basilicas, not painted but wrought in mosaic. Take for example, the mosaic from the church of SS. Cosma and Damiano, which belongs to the sixth century; or the mosaic from the Baptistry of Constantine, belonging to the fourth century. It is not a strange but a familiar face that greets us. The unpracticed eye will vaguely discern, and the practiced eye will see clearly the lines of the same face that Angelico loved and that Raphael transfigured. It is no other than the face of Jesus that men love to-day. It is undeveloped, set, hard; but it is still the same face that is stamped upon every picture of the Christ that adorns the world's great galleries. The



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germ of the sixteenth century art so far as it relates to Christ, is here in the mosaics of the Basilicas.

We must, therefore, for the original, press still farther back. Enter the darkness once more, this time physical not spiritual darkness. Here, in the gloom of the catacombs, in the dark corridors where the early Christians buried their dead, in the dismal halls where they held glad but trembling fellowship one with another, there are to be found pictures of Jesus that have an interest for us far beyond that given them by their artistic merit.

The Chapel of St. Callisto, a chapel which was closed by Papal edict in the year 365 A. D., has been opened in recent years, and has revealed a fresco portrait of Jesus. It is now much damaged, and does not disclose what it may have been originally when the worshiping Christians looked upon it. An early reproduction of it, however, has been preserved. This fresco must date from before the year 365 A. D. Criticism assigns it to the second century. As this face shines upon us from the darkness of the catacombs, is it the face of a stranger or the face of a friend? Archbishop Farrar, in his "Life of Christ as represented in Art," declares that it has no relation and no resemblance to the pictures of Jesus of these later days. It is difficult, however, not to feel that his statement is colored by preconceived opinion. One is at least led to this

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conclusion, that here is a face the earliest Christians loved to look upon, which in its simple grandeur, in its serene majesty, in its touch of sorrow, in its quiet sadness, in its self poise and strength, in its tenderness and seeming sympathy, looks more as we think Jesus ought to look than any painting of the world's more modern genius. And, with all due respect to a contrary opinion, it may be asserted with confidence that this is, the same face that we have seen elsewhere, the face that out of a thousand we always single out and say, "This is the Christ."

From somewhere then back of Raphael, earlier than Giotto, antedating the Byzantine mosaics there comes to us the face we so well know and so dearly love. The Christians in the catacombs knew the same face. It is in these same catacombs, then, in this wonderful thesaurus of ancient pictures, this underground Art Gallery, that we must look for further confirmation of our hope of finding the original.

According to the custom of the Christians who found here a refuge for the living and for the dead, the body, intended for burial, was placed in a narrow shelf-like receptacle; and there was often placed with it at the head, one of the small communion cups which were used in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. This cup sank a little into the soft plaster with which the tomb had been prepared for its occupant, and as the



FRESCO OF CHRIST
FROM
THE CHAPEL OF ST. CALLISTO.

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plastic material closed over it, the base, thus covered, was hermetically sealed. Very often these cups had been ornamented with symbols, or with portraits wrought in gold upon the glass. Sometimes the portraits were of the Apostles; sometimes they were of Christ, who was frequently symbolized as the Good Shepherd. If attention is now given to the place where these cups ought to be, if there at all, it will be found that the centuries have wrought dissolution. The cups have been shivered into fine and vanishing dust. But as we carefully break away the coating of mortar, we shall find also that the base of the cup has been preserved. Sealed from the outer air, this has escaped the ravages of time. Some of them now in the Vatican are in a fairly good state of preservation. In one, to which Sir Wyke Bayliss calls especial attention, we find the faces of Peter and Paul. Their names wrought into the glass leave no uncertainty as to whose face is intended. But standing above them, reaching out his hand in the act of crowning them is another figure, unnamed. Wrought in miniature in the glass, coming from the grave within the grave, this nameless face looks out upon us. It is crudely drawn; it is lacking in beauty; it is not the work of genius, but it is still the face of Jesus. However poorly drawn, it is the same type of face that Da Vinci took for his "Last Supper" and the type which every other artist has followed.

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The untrained eye might not at the first glance recognize it; but the eye that is trained to see the full significance of a face, will at once discover the similarity. If a friend places in your hand a photograph of a boy, asking whether you know the original, you may at the first glance see no resemblance to any face with which you are familiar; but as you look more carefully, and look again into the face of your friend, you begin to see that it is his face in boyhood's days. The more it is studied the clearer the likeness appears. So with this face of Jesus in miniature. It may seem unfamiliar; but even the untaught student as he considers it will soon see the face of the Christ stand out with distinctness. It is surely the same type that we have found in all the other pictures.

In these same strange tombs, above the sleeping dead, looking down upon them as that which in the final awakening they would first see, the crude artist of the time painted a face. It was the custom also to spread face-cloths over the face of the dead. Very often upon these face-cloths a face was painted that should as it were, continue to look down, eye to eye, upon the dead. In either case, upon the wall and upon the cloth, it is the same face we have elsewhere seen that is struggling to break through.

What then, we ask, is the origin of the face of Jesus that men are accustomed to paint? It must be

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answered that it is not the product of modern times. It does not come from the splendid genius of Italy. We find its origin nowhere, yet we find the face everywhere. We trace it back into the catacombs, almost to the very day when men lived who had seen the Christ himself, and who could not have been deceived by any untrue representation of him. These early Christians, like later ones, would have rejoiced to possess a true picture of their Lord; certainly they could not have been persuaded to accept a false likeness for a true one; they would have known whether any picture was well accredited or not; yet they had what purported to be the likeness of their Master.

This then is our case: We are back almost at the time when men lived who might have seen Jesus; a picture that claims to be like him has somehow gained currency; there is only one face that has any claim to be like him. That which best stands as a type for all is the early portrait in St. Callisto's chapel. As we look upon it, upon this portrait from which all other pictures seem like variations; as we note its majesty, its simplicity, its beauty, we are ready to say with Sir Wyke Bayliss, "The man who painted this was an artist who had seen the Christ." It is not like a photograph; it is not like a painting from life; but it is as if a face that had been indelibly stamped upon the artist's heart by a life vision, had here been reproduced with



RAPHAEL.

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the brush. It is the face painted from memory by one who had seen and loved the Man of Galilee.

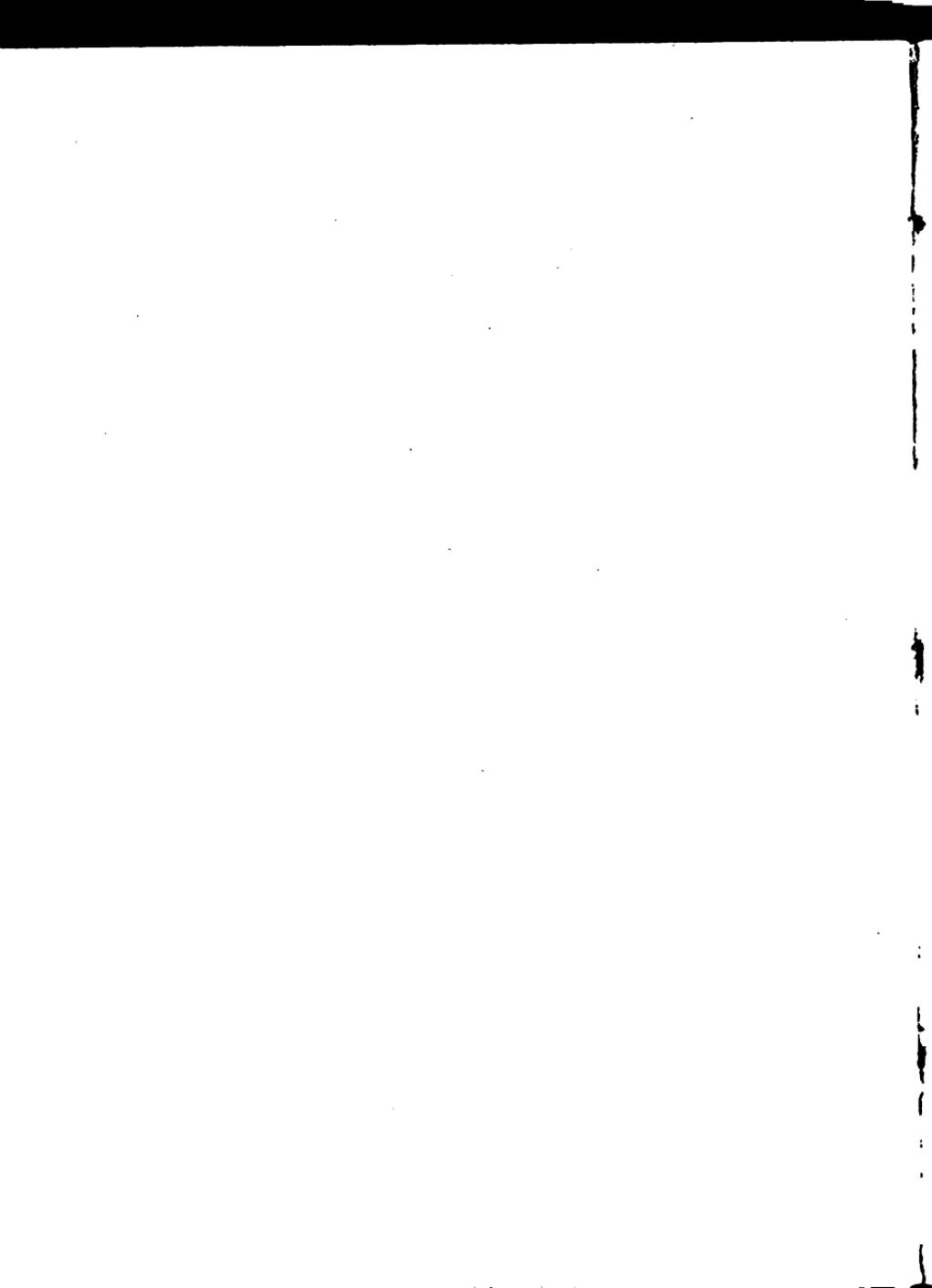
The conclusion to which we are thus forced is that the Christian conception of the face of Jesus, as we have gained it from the world's paintings, is as a matter of fact, in all probability very like the Christ of the Gospels. The face that bent over the daughter of Jairus as the life-giving words were spoken; the face that looked with tender compassion into the eyes of the Magdalen; the face that turned in pitying sadness upon Peter; the face that from the cross looked down upon Mary in love and upon the people with forgiveness, was, in its general character, in its abiding lines, in its fundamental type very like the face that artists have always painted. It was the face that we see, not in any one painting, or in any one school of painting, but in all together, the face of the real Jesus who once lived among men.

Were Jesus of Nazareth to walk our streets today as a stranger, we would recognize him; not by any divine mark, not by any aureole of glory; but because he would look so much like the type of face that has come down to us from the catacombs, and that has stamped itself upon every picture of the Christ that the hand of man has painted. And, the time shall come, when satisfied because in his likeness, we shall see him as he is; see the glorified Christ, "the same yester-

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day, today and forever," even the same Jesus whom the astonished disciples saw go into heaven; then as sometimes on seeing a familiar look in the face of one unknown, shall we say, "I have seen that face before."

The dawning of the new life in his presence shall be with new yet familiar glory, as the new day brings to each the unforgotten glory of yesterday's sun, and our joy then, as now, will be "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."



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